



Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)

Posted by [Pierluigi Oliverio](#) on Monday, April 21, 2008

City Hall Diary

Recently, I attended the San Jose Elections Commission where Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) was on the agenda. (By the way, there are two unfilled seats waiting for SJ residents on this commission.) IRV was discussed, but the commission deferred the item for one year. The main reason for deferral was that to implement IRV would require a vote of the people to change the city charter. This in itself was not a worry; however, the cost for the city to put it on the ballot was viewed as bad timing, considering our current budget deficit.

In the long term I believe IRV would save money by eliminating the runoff election for council members and the mayor. For example, when I was elected in a runoff election, the cost billed to the city from the Registrar of Voters was \$511,196. Ouch! Locally, IRV is done in San Francisco where there is only one election in November, which ends up having a higher voter turnout.

Some of the other benefits of IRV are it encourages positive campaigning and more coalition building, candidates only raise money once, and voters can rank their choice of candidates.

Currently in San Jose a candidate must have 50 percent plus one vote to win an election. When it gets down to two people for the runoff, it tends to be a negative campaign, which in our city often pits the Labor Council against the Chamber of Commerce. Candidates try to raise all the money they can, and special interest groups throw in their weight with independent expenditures. With all this raising of money by the candidate and independent expenditures comes "some" loss of independence for elected officials. Inevitably, there is an awareness of who helped get you elected. This is one reason I never started an "office holder" account which would have allowed me to solicit donations year round. I think that candidates should run once, not twice. One election is much better for the sanity of the candidates and their families.

Also, your vote counts more than ever, since you rank your choices. So now the voter may decide to vote for the candidate they really like versus who they think can actually win; or when torn between two candidates, your second choice may actually fare better.

For a brief description of Instant Runoff Voting I turn to Wikipedia:

IRV is a voting system used for single-winner elections in which voters each have one vote, but rank candidates in order of choice. In an IRV election, if no candidate receives an overall majority of first choices, the candidates with fewest votes are eliminated one by one, and ballots cast for those candidates are recounted for the next choice candidate until the winner achieves a majority among remaining candidates. The term "instant runoff voting" is used because this process resembles a series of runoff elections.

So, would you prefer this IRV process or what we have today?

What are the pros and cons of each as YOU see it?

Would it have changed the outcome in the mayor's race?

Would it make a difference in the upcoming elections in Districts 2 and 8?

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